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How to win
our Workers.

U. S. G. O.
98.



HOW TO WIN OUR WORKERS.
A SHORT ACCOUNT
OF
THE LEEDS SEWING SCHOOL
FOR FACTORY GIRLS.

BY MRS. HYDE.

DEDICATED, BY PERMISSION, TO
THE EARL OF CARLISLE

“‘But what is to be done with our manufacturing population, with our agricultural, with our ever increasing population?’ cry many. Aye, what? Many things can be done with them, a hundred things, and a thousand things, had we once got a soul, and begun to try.”—CARLYLE.

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TO
THE RIGHT HON.
THE EARL OF CARLISLE

MY LORD,

I WAS encouraged to solicit your Lordship's permission to dedicate these pages to you, by the conviction that no one has done more to promote sympathy between different classes than your Lordship. No one more entirely possesses the talents, manners, and disposition requisite to soften and conciliate mankind (which a well-known writer affirmed to have been the special mission of "the Howards").

and no one has had more extensive opportunities of manifesting those high qualities.

That your Lordship may long live to diffuse a genial influence around you, and to advance the cause of education and charity, is the sincere prayer of

Your Lordship's

Obliged and faithful Servant,

MARY A. HYDE.

EAST DEREHAM,
March, 1862.

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HOW TO WIN OUR WORKERS.
A SHORT ACCOUNT
OF
THE LEEDS SEWING SCHOOL.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

ON the 13th of March, 1854, the late Mr. Justice Talfourd, in charging the Grand Jury at Stafford Assizes, made use of the following words :—

“Separation between class and class is the great curse of British society ; for this, we are all, more or less, in our respective spheres, in some degree responsible ; and this is more complete in the manufacturing than in the agricultural districts, where the resident gentry are enabled to shed around them the blessings resulting from the exercise of benevolence, and the influence and example of active kindness.

“I am afraid we all of us keep too much

aloof from those beneath us, whom we thus encourage to look upon us with suspicion and dislike. Even to our servants, we think, perhaps, we fulfil our duty when we perform our contract with them, when we pay them their wages, and treat them with the civility consistent with our habits and feelings, when we curb our tempers and use no violent expressions towards them. But how painful is the thought that there are men and women, growing up around us, ministering to our comforts and necessities, continually inmates of our dwellings, with whose affections and nature we are as much unacquainted as if they were the inhabitants of some other sphere. This feeling, arising from that kind of reserve peculiar to the English character, does, I think, greatly tend to prevent that mingling of class with class, that reciprocation of kind words and gentle affections, gracious admonitions and kind inquiries, which often, more than any book-education, tend to the culture of the affections of the heart, and the refinement and elevation of the character of those to whom they are addressed. And, if I were to be asked what is the great want of English society, I would say in one word, SYMPATHY."

Scarcely had these memorable words fallen on the ears of those who filled the Court, when the voice of this great and good man failed ; he had ceased to breathe. They were his dying utterance, and seem almost to have come to us with light from that other world to which his spirit was removed with such awful suddenness ; and rendered thus mournfully impressive, they have, doubtless, prompted many efforts towards bridging over that gulf which divides rich from poor in this land.

The separation of outward circumstances is, indeed, a law of God which cannot be broken ; but the separation of inward feelings is a barrier of our own creating, and one which it behoves us all to do what lies in our power to remove. And to introduce more means of friendly intercourse between different classes (that intercourse being founded on some mutual interest or pursuit, and not one simply of patronage or charity, on the one side, and humble, though perhaps not grateful, acceptance on the other), is the great want of our time.

The mischief resulting from this estrangement between class and class, is seen on a large scale when, in our manufacturing districts, it breaks out in the wasteful war of "strikes,"

arresting the natural course of trade, and shaking the prosperity of the few, while it desolates and impoverishes the homes of the many.

It has been truly said that "all battle is misunderstanding; did the parties know one another the battle would cease. No man at bottom means injustice; it is always for some obscure, distorted image of a right that he contends; an obscure image, diffracted, exaggerated, in the wonderfulest way by natural dimness and selfishness, getting tenfold more diffracted by exasperation of contest, till at length it becomes all but irreconisable; yet still the image of a right. Could a man own to himself that the thing he fought for was wrong, contrary to fairness and the law of reason, he would own also that it thereby stood condemned and hopeless; he could fight for it no longer. Nay, independently of right, could the contending parties get but accurately to discern one another's might and strength to contend, the one would peacefully yield to the other and to Necessity; the contest in this case, too, were over."

Can any one who has sorrowfully watched these suicidal struggles between masters and workmen refuse to acknowledge the truth of this passage from one of our most earnest

thinkers, or to see that a more intimate knowledge of each other would do much to remove these misunderstandings?

On a far smaller scale, yet with so much frequency as to become almost intolerable, the evils caused by the want of sympathy are experienced in the daily life of our households; where we can hardly expect true and faithful services from those who too often feel themselves to be but as aliens in the homes whose joys and sorrows they ought to share.

As the efforts which are recorded in these pages did appear to be in a measure successful in producing a good understanding with a class, perhaps almost more separated from us than any other, they have been thought worth noting down.

Those who commenced the institution of which we are about to speak did it with other and far humbler aims; but the seed took root, spread as a grain of mustard seed, and is now a goodly tree.

CHAPTER II.

MILL-OWNERS AND AGRICULTURISTS.

“ Among our aristocracy there are men—we trust there are many men—who feel that they also are workmen, born to toil, ever in their great Taskmaster’s eye, faithfully with heart and head for those that with heart and hand do, under the great Taskmaster, toil for them ; who have even this noblest and hardest work set before them—to deliver out of that Egyptian bondage to Wretchedness, and Ignorance, and Sin, the hard-handed millions.”—
CARLYLE.

THERE can be no question but that of late years a vast increase has taken place in the interest felt by our Merchant Princes in the welfare of those by whose labour their wealth is created. The noble libraries, schools, and churches, which their liberality has erected and endowed, are substantial proofs of their recognition of their duties as “ true captains of labour.” The time has been when it might be truly said of most of our great factories, that the masters, immersed in business and intent on gain, gave no further heed to their workpeople than as “ hands ” by whose toil they were to be enriched ;

merely "hands"—as if neither heads, hearts, nor souls, belonged to them. They were left entirely under the charge of overlookers, who, having usually risen from the ranks, were for that very reason (a strange one) too often harsh to those whose level they had quitted. If a girl was disabled by sickness or accident, or detained from her work by unavoidable claims at home, she was "knocked off" as the phrase runs—the wave of labour closed over her head ; and if the master walked through the mill, he would miss her no more than he would a broken bobbin from its spindle. Now, while we heartily rejoice in the many and honourable exceptions to this state of things, which are to be found in the establishments of our great manufacturers, we are constrained to allege that in too many factories these evils cannot yet be spoken of as "things of the past." In such instances personal acquaintance with the "hands" is never even aimed at : yet, as we have been told of a large farmer being able to recognise every one of his thousand sheep by its countenance, we see no reason why some such knowledge of the human flock should not be attained ; and it is from this personal interest in those who work for us that all true sympathy must spring.

An agriculturist can scarcely help knowing something of his labourers—his wife and daughters something of their families :—their numbers are comparatively so small, and their dwellings so much in sight, that they cannot be entirely ignored. In the rank of small farmers, much harshness, and occasionally much brutal neglect, is, we fear, to be found ; but the wealthier inhabitants of the country retain somewhat of the paternal feelings of feudal times, and more or less do visit, teach, and comfort, their poorer neighbours.

But whatever advantages the country gentleman may have over the mill-owner in discharging the duty in question, they do not extend to his wife or daughters, who do not find wet walks through rough lanes to dirty crowded cottages so pleasant in fact as in fiction. Yet many country ladies cheerfully encounter these inconveniences ; and we believe that the families of mill-owners would find as much true pleasure in cultivating friendly relations with their fathers' workpeople, as in the perusal of all the gaily tinted volumes which Mudie can supply, or in the most elaborate fancy-work which German industry can devise. It is true *that some hindrances and discouragements*

might meet them in their first attempts to penetrate the lanes and courts of large towns, but these would soon vanish before earnest perseverance; and visiting known workpeople with the sort of *prestige* which would attach to the "master's" family—would be a totally different thing from mere district or charitable-society visiting. Occasions for the exercise of charity would doubtless occur; but while working people are in health and employment, charity ought to be avoided. It would not be "twice blessed," but quite otherwise—altering and destroying that friendly intercourse which is so desirable.

Such a knowledge of one another, and the mutual kindness which it would engender, would, I believe, do more to prevent strikes than all the mischief-making eloquence of demagogues could do to encourage them. One great cause of discontent amongst factory workers is the jealous feeling that they are cared for merely as "hands;" that is, machines for obtaining wealth and luxuries, which they do not share, and which they over-value through ignorance of the cares which attend them. When the wheel of time in its revolutions brings those periods of depression of trade which seem inevitable,

the privations of the operatives are utterly disproportioned to those of their masters, whose actual troubles, being chiefly mental, are not easily appreciated by those whose needs are physical. The amplest allowance ought therefore to be made for their impatience, or rather, the greatest admiration felt for their patience under sufferings which we can hardly realize.

CHAPTER III.

SERVANTS.

“Month-long contracts please me little in any province where there can, by possibility, be found virtue enough for more. Month-long contracts do not answer well even with your house-servants; the liberty on both sides to change every month is growing very ape-like, nomadic; and I hear philosophers predict that it will alter, or that strange results will follow; that wise men, pestered with nomads, with unattached ever-shifting spies and enemies rather than friends and servants, will gradually, weighing substance against semblance, with indignation, dismiss such, down almost to the very shoe-black, and say, ‘Begone, I will serve myself rather, and have peace!’”—CARLYLE.

Few subjects are so frequently discussed in the drawing-rooms of the middle classes as that of “the scarcity of good female servants.” Probably no more fertile cause of discomfort troubles the homes of England than this oft-lamented want. No one can deny either its existence or its inconvenience, and people account for it in various ways, according to their experiences and dispositions. By many it is attributed to what they term “over-education.”

By a few the want of *better* education is alleged—and there is some foundation for each of these opinions. But, then, let it be admitted that both the over-education and the want of better education, apply quite as much to the mistresses as to the servants of the present day.

The slight smattering of knowledge which is acquired by girls, at even the best-managed national schools, can hardly be expected to produce any very great effect on their characters, either for good or for evil. And the boldest opponent of “over-education” would hardly maintain that the acquisition of reading and writing, arithmetic and plain sewing, and some small acquaintance with Scripture history, *ought* to make a girl a bad servant.

Admitting, therefore, that this class is found less fit than formerly for domestic service, let us see if other and more cogent reasons than “over-education” cannot be found.

Not the slight increase of knowledge, but the very great increase in luxury of dress, and the general tendency of each class to ape the one above it, ought to bear a large proportion of the blame; and does not this evil exist in *even a greater degree amongst the young ladies*

of the families (aye, and the old ones too), who criticise the shortcomings of their domestics so severely ?

Doubtless it *is* a serious, and a very prevalent evil, that industrious, clean, hard-working women of the poorer class should so often take a foolish pride in allowing their daughters to idle over some bit of fancy-work while they themselves are washing or scouring. But it is an evil which goes steadily upwards in society. In the rank just above this, the active mother assists in preparing the dinner, irons fine things, and darns the socks of her husband and sons, nay, often the young ladies' stockings also, while they play on the pianoforte, or crochêt ugly anti-macassars. Ascend a step higher in society and you find mamma, who has perhaps herself married on a small income and practised economy in her early days, dressing her girls like damsels of high degree, and expecting their *mendges*, when they settle in life, to begin where hers ends, after years of successful toil.

Now, it may be true that all this perpetual struggle upwards has its good effects ; but surely it has been overdone of late years. A re-enactment of sumptuary laws is not to be desired, but I should thankfully see in all

ranks of English society more striving for an equality of *inward* refinement, and less for the mere *outward* one of dress and furniture.

Very great difficulties appear at present to beset the various schemes for training girls for domestic service in industrial schools. Nor is this at all to be wondered at. In the first place, the expenses of such institutions are necessarily heavy; a large staff of teachers and costly buildings are required. And, if cooking is to be taught, there must be food provided to cook, and mouths to eat it afterwards, for we can hardly suppose that any one ever put in practice such a plan as we have seen gravely recommended by a high authority (one of Her Majesty's inspectors of schools), that of *cooking imaginary viands over cold stoves*—whether to be followed by the legitimate conclusion of a Barmecide's feast we are not informed.

But I believe the main difficulty to be overcome in most industrial schools is a certain sense of unreality. There is a disheartening kind of artificial character about the whole proceeding. If women have really arrived at such a pitch of folly and ignorance that one rank *will* not, and the class above them *cannot*,

train girls to household work, such plans must be resorted to. But, after all, the process will remain unnatural—like that of rearing fowls by the Eccaleobion, instead of the real hen, and with this disadvantage, that in the case of the chicks, when once the “steam-mother” has cherished them into life, unerring instinct guides their proceedings; whereas the girls, as they grow older, either forget their necessarily formal training, or feel discouraged by the want in private houses of those appliances to which they have been accustomed in public institutions. The natural, healthy process is, that lessons of this sort should be learnt almost in childhood, in the cottage-home, under a mother’s teaching, and perfected under the direction of firm, kind mistresses, who know what servants ought to do, and will see that it is done.

CHAPTER IV.

MISTRESSES.

"In Poor and Rich, instead of noble thrift and plenty, there is idle luxury alternating with mean scarcity and inability. We have sumptuous garnitures for our Life, but have forgotten to *live* in the middle of them."—CARLYLE.

IN our great-grandmothers' days—the

"Teacup times of hood and hoop,
And while the patch was worn"—

no doubt too much time was devoted by ladies to their storeroom and kitchen; but, while making their elaborate pasties and preserves (which their husbands probably relished) they also made the good servants whom their descendants so much regret. Mutual pursuits induced mutual sympathy; in the hours passed in these domestic arts a friendly, hearty knowledge grew up between mistresses and servants, not trenching upon the self-respect of either, but binding them together with ties which often endured through the calms and storms of a whole life. And I own I doubt if any increase

of accomplishments which this generation can boast of will ever conduce half so much to the happiness of its households as did this thorough union of feeling between families and their domestics. But, whatever may be the deficiencies of young women at present as to good housekeeping, the fault is hardly their own. In their childhood, a false idea of "gentility" confined them to the nursery, and to a constant association with one servant there, while taught to avoid all the rest, as if infected by disease. No sooner had they ceased to be children than they were sent off to school to acquire accomplishments; and here again "gentility" met them at every turn, teaching them to consider household cares as fit only for menials. Thus carefully trained to uselessness, and guarded from learning, even by observation, those domestic arts which all women ought to understand, even if not called upon to practise, they have been sent among the realities of life, sadly unprepared to meet its daily demands.

It came recently to my knowledge that a young Englishwoman, travelling with her husband, was detained at one of the crowded German hotels by his severe illness. He turned with disgust from all the unfamiliar messes

furnished by the foreign kitchen, although nourishment was all-important. A packet of arrowroot was discovered at the bottom of the lady's trunk, put in by a careful mother; but, unluckily, her care had not extended to teaching its use. After vainly trying herself to concoct a palatable food, Mrs. — visited the rooms of every Englishwoman in the hotel; but not one could throw light upon the mystery of making a cup of arrowroot!

It was a truly womanly and noble impulse which sent so many English ladies to the Crimea and Scutari; but only Miss Nightingale herself could reveal the utter uselessness of many of those devoted heroines, in consequence of their ignorance of the simplest arts of household work.

Many a husband, with a small income, would thankfully exchange his wife's acquirements in music or languages for the practical knowledge which would enable her to arrange a wholesome and economical daily meal for him; and how many a man has paused, when he might have become a happy husband, because he saw neither power nor inclination in the girl he admired to become a useful wife. I must own that I do not think that what are usually called

accomplishments often add much to the happiness of married life, or in any way repay the expenditure of time and money by which they are acquired. The universal and indiscriminate teaching of music, as at present carried on, degrades real art, and encourages only mediocrity, both in teachers and pupils. I should, therefore, gladly see some of the hours now spent on acquiring the mechanism of music bestowed on practical housewifery. Such occupations need not trench in the least upon the time wanted for *real* education, as was effectually proved in those long past days, when skill in household arts was carried to its highest perfection, and combined with an amount of classical learning which we now do not even aim at. Those who have read the recently published "Memoirs of Mrs. Delany" (Mary Granville) can hardly fail to have been struck with the combination which they exhibit of a taste for literature of the best kind, unusual accomplishments in music, painting, and elaborate and original fancy-work, with a steady attention to domestic details, and a hearty relish for household cares. This is not only displayed by Mrs. Delany herself, whose activity both of body and mind might be considered exceptional; but would appear to have

been generally prevalent a hundred years ago in the high society which these letters, with feminine minuteness, photograph for us.

That the real female aristocracy of our land, whether of rank or talent, is recognising the true duties of women, we may thankfully acknowledge ; but beneath their level there lies a sadly deep stratum of ignorance and pretension, which good sense will take long to penetrate.

What seems most desirable at present is so to educate young women that, when called upon to preside over moderate households, and to dispense incomes of from three to six or eight hundred a year, they may have sufficient good sense, management, and honest self-reliance to dress themselves, and entertain their friends agreeably and comfortably, without apeing the arrangements and expenditure of those whose establishments and incomes are on a totally different scale.

CHAPTER V.

INTERCOURSE BETWEEN CLASS AND CLASS.

"To sit idle aloft, like living statues, like absurd Epicurus-gods, in pampered isolation, in exclusion from the glorious fateful battle-field of this God's World: it is a poor life for a man when all Upholsterers and French Cooks have done their utmost for it! Nay, what a shallow delusion is this we have all got into, that any man should or can keep himself apart from men, have 'no business' with them, except a cash account 'business!' It is the silliest tale a distressed generation of men ever took to telling one another. Men cannot live isolated; we *are* all bound together, for mutual good or else for mutual misery, as living nerves in the same body. No highest man can disunite himself from any lowest. Consider it.

* * * * *

Not in having 'no business' with men, but in having no unjust business with them, and in *having* all manner of true and just business, can either his or their blessedness be found possible, and this waste world become, for both parties, a home and peopled garden."—CARLYLE.

ASSUMING, therefore, that the cultivation of a more extended sympathy between different ranks is thus important to the well-being of society, let us see by what means it can best be effected.

In country parishes it is not so very difficult to find occasions on which to meet "those whom, on Sundays, we call our brethren;" yet even there the estrangement is far too great. In days gone by, the gentry shared more than at present in the amusements of the poor; and, while we rejoice that they are now too refined to take pleasure in fairs or wakes, we may yet regret the absence of that restraint upon vice and coarseness which their presence produced; and we ought to do our best to replace these objectionable amusements by some which are more innocent.

Where ploughing matches, cottagers' flower-shows, and harvest homes, are judiciously managed, and the resident gentry will exert themselves to promote the rational pleasures of their dependents, the effect is most salutary upon all who are thus associated for a common object.

This union of feeling is one of the most valuable effects which we may hope for from the Volunteer movement, in which it is much to be desired that working men should feel themselves true brothers in arms with the higher ranks.

In a humbler way, if a country clergyman will preside over the village quoit or cricket

ground, he may often acquire an influence over his younger parishioners, when at the most lawless and dangerous age, which no amount of zeal, shown in a more professional way, could give him. He may check their rough ways, curb their angry tempers, restrain any approach to coarse language, and turn their thoughts to higher and better objects, especially where evening classes for varied instruction can be organized to take the place of out-door sports as winter approaches. One of the most besetting sins of our working people, of both sexes, is the fearfully violent language to which they resort when excited ; and this is most effectually checked by their association with those whose manners are refined. Had any proof of this been needed, the unanimous testimony of the ladies who nursed our wounded soldiers in the Crimea is most conclusive.

In large towns the separation of classes is far wider, and requires special efforts to overcome. There it is not easy to meet the labouring people face to face, still harder to meet them heart to heart.

I would not seem to undervalue the exertions of the clergy. Want of zeal is not now the fault of our Church ; and in large towns their

labours are often beyond all praise. But their visits are necessarily professional and unfrequent, and cannot even aim at any union of classes. Tract distributors and Scripture readers are also, in their respective departments, excellent; but something more than all that these can do is wanted.

So far as I know, no plan has yet been devised for reaching that very numerous and important class—the young people employed in factories—which has been so almost uniformly successful, as the assembling them in evening schools, where they meet with, and are instructed by, educated ladies and gentlemen.

That this instruction should be gratuitous I believe also to be proved by experience; for, although classes where payment has been required have often had a temporary success, they have fallen off after a while—the penny is either grudged or not forthcoming, and then a feeling of shame keeps the pupil away.

I also think it essential that such schools should be officered entirely by unpaid teachers, believing that the civilizing influence, which is their most important object, can only be obtained when the pupils feel that they are served from love.

I should also prescribe the exclusion of children below the age at which they begin to earn money. Their presence annoys their elders, and if (as is often the case) the children are the quickest and least ignorant, the others are discouraged. Moreover, a larger staff of teachers would be required, and children, who have the opportunity of being instructed during the day-time, have no business at evening schools.

It is very difficult for us, who are accustomed from our infancy to use books every day of our lives, to realize the fact that children who, when at school, read with tolerable facility and intelligence, do, in two or three years, lose that acquirement so entirely as to retain only an indistinct knowledge of the letters and smaller words, and are therefore totally incapable of deriving either pleasure or instruction from a book. And, after many years of teaching and familiarity with schools for the poor, I have only just discovered that it is not unusual for them to write neatly, while unable to read the words they have mechanically copied. However widely, therefore, elementary instruction may be dispensed to children, we shall find that a few years of busy life efface so much of it as to render some renewal very desirable.

Part-singing, although not a primary object in evening classes, is at least a useful and most popular adjunct, and, in the northern parts of England, the people possess a remarkable talent for it. Probably the plan known as "Curwen's Tonic Sol-fa System" will be found to answer best, as it enables those ignorant of music to read part-songs with great facility.

Factory girls have usually had but little chance of acquiring the important art of needle-work ; and instruction in sewing affords opportunity for much other *indirect* teaching, besides being peculiarly favourable to an easy intercourse with ladies.

Sewing classes have also the recommendation of being inexpensive to establish, and of substantially benefiting a poor neighbourhood, by facilitating the purchase of useful clothing. I do not think that it is desirable to attempt to teach sewing and reading on the same evening.

During the last few years many of these schools have sprung up, but many have also withered away, after a brief existence : seldom, I believe, from any lack of gratitude in those for whose benefit they were designed ; but rather from some faulty arrangement, or shortcoming, on the part of the managers. In some cases

there has been an over-strictness of discipline, which is clearly out of place in such schools. After ten hours' confinement to a monotonous and mechanical employment, where silence, if not absolutely required by the overlookers, is yet pretty nearly necessitated by the noise of the machinery, a little cheerful talk is surely a needful refreshment; and, unless some liberty of speech is allowed, the teachers cannot gain any real knowledge of their pupils, nor encourage that friendly intercourse which is one of the most valuable parts of the evening's instruction.*

Another usually fatal mistake is made where such classes are broken up during the summer time. It is quite possible that when they re-

* A striking illustration of what is here advanced occurred in the sewing school which I shall presently describe. A gentleman, who took part in its management, endeavoured to introduce into it the same strict discipline which he had formerly enforced in a village school. With the best intentions possible, he totally misunderstood the character and habits of our scholars, who met his attempts with quiet, but most resolute, opposition. He persevered, notwithstanding, and the consequence was that the school rapidly dwindled in numbers until, one evening, only five girls appeared, who declared, "If yon man is going to come reg'lar we'll come no more." He then saw the necessity of his withdrawal from the school, and upon his leaving it the offended damsels returned.

assemble, at the beginning of winter, the *numbers* may be as large as before the vacation; but the *individuals* will not generally be the same; or, at any rate, whatever influence may have been gained by the labour of the winter, will have totally evaporated while the girls were rambling about the streets during the long evenings of summer. I have always found *scholars* quite as willing to come in summer as in winter; and *teachers* are usually more inclined to attend when neither cold nor darkness have to be encountered, though it may be remarked (by the way) that these causes do not operate to prevent evening engagements of a different kind.

The want of a sufficiently numerous staff of teachers has broken down very many schools, and prevented others from being opened. In my own six years' experience, in a large town, where there must have been scores of ladies, free from all hindrances, except their own timidity or unwillingness to make the exertion, the scarcity of teachers was a constant trouble. It seems hard that this should be the case; the time required is not long—three hours' absence from home on one evening in a week is all that need be demanded from any one but the actual superintendent. No especial talent is needful,

but courteous manners, patience, and regularity of attendance, are indispensable, more particularly the last. Those who enter upon such engagements ought to hold them sacred, but the sacrifice is small, and the reward will be found to be out of proportion great.

CHAPTER VI.

LEEDS SEWING SCHOOL.

"All work is as seed sown ; it grows, and spreads, and sows itself anew, and so, in endless palingenesia, lives and works."—CARLYLE.

HAVING advanced these general opinions, as to the duty and best method of cultivating friendly relations with the rising generation of workpeople in our large towns, I may now be permitted to relate my own personal experience in this matter.

About ten years ago it occurred to the teachers of a Sunday-school, in one of the most crowded districts of Leeds, that they might benefit some of their pupils by assembling them two nights in the week, in order to give them instruction in sewing. The plan was mentioned to me, and I was invited to attend very soon after the classes were opened. The commencement was certainly not very promising; about a dozen rough, dirty-looking girls were sitting at a long table, some of them merely resting on

their folded arms, staring about them, and a few steadily trying to do some very coarse work, under the direction of their teachers. I felt interested in the experiment; but circumstances prevented my seeing any more of it for several months. At the beginning of the following year, having more leisure, I began to think in earnest about the sewing school. Finding that the attendance had very much increased, and that the work now required longer time for preparation than could be afforded during the school nights, I proposed to take the entire charge of purchasing the materials, cutting out the articles required, and tacking them ready for the inexperienced fingers which were to sew them. My offer was accepted, and the work gradually increased so much upon me, as to absorb nearly my whole time, entailing sacrifices and inconveniences which, had not my husband felt as much interest in the school as I did myself, would have been neither justifiable nor possible. During the next four years we rarely missed attending the school twice a week, and I may truly say that, though, from not being at that time in strong health, I was often very tired, I hardly remember ever passing an unpleasant hour there.

In 1857 we quitted Leeds, leaving the school with very great reluctance and regret, though feeling most thankful that we were so favoured as to find friends who were willing to bestow as much labour and thought on its welfare as we had done. Although now far removed from Leeds and its warm-hearted inhabitants, we do not consider our connexion with the "Mill Street Sewing School" broken off; and, being in constant communication with those who now preside over its affairs, and under whose care it has nearly doubled its size (the nightly attendance ranging from 150 to 200), I have, at their desire, undertaken to describe its progress, blending the results of our joint experience.

Our rules have now been tested during nine years, and as scarcely any alterations have been found desirable, I will here detail them for the guidance of others.

The school assembles every Monday and Thursday evening, at seven o'clock, in a spacious room, well warmed in winter, brightly lighted with gas, and arranged with long tables and benches. When a girl applies for admission, her name, age, residence, and occupation, are registered, and she receives a card, with her name *and a number* written upon it, and to which a

string is attached. She may now attend the school, and either bring work of her own, or order some article of useful clothing; this is cut out and prepared for her against the next night of meeting. To this work is attached a ticket with her name, the date of the order, and the price of the article, and when she takes it, the particulars are entered from this ticket in an alphabetical book, in which the scholar is from time to time credited with such payments as she makes. No order is executed till something has been paid in advance. When the article is fully paid for, the scholar is allowed to take it away, and she has a pass ticket to that effect given to her, which she delivers to the door-keeper at the end of the evening. The unfinished work is collected into sacks, one for each table, each piece being tied up with the pupils' name-card outside, so that it may be readily found on the next school-night. Each table is presided over by one or more lady teachers, and supplied gratuitously with needles and thread. At a table in the centre of the room sits a gentleman, who takes the orders down in a book; delivers out the new goods, and generally superintends. In the ante-room all the unfinished work is laid out before school-

time, under the charge of the door-keeper ; and a teacher sits there to receive payments, entering them with such accuracy that, if a single halfpenny has been paid in twelve months ago, it can readily be traced and claimed. If an article is left for six months, without any payment being made on account, it is returned to stock ; but the girl who ordered it has credit for the instalments she has paid.

At intervals during the evening the girls sing hymns and part-songs, which they do with much delight to themselves, and with much pleasure to the listeners ; their voices being in general remarkably sweet, and their aptitude for part-singing very uncommon. The superintendent occasionally reads aloud, or the teachers introduce, at their respective tables, some useful subject of conversation, or relate stories, for which the girls have a great relish. A little before 9 o'clock, the work is collected ; the girls seat themselves, facing the superintendent, and, after a minute's silence, he reads a chapter of the Bible. A short address is frequently given, either on a part of the chapter just read, or on some improving subject, suited to the comprehension of the scholars ; this has usually been given by the gentleman who, in fact, originated

the school, and to whom the ways and wants of the poor are well known. He possesses a rare power of addressing them in language which they can thoroughly understand ; and of pointing out their failings in a manner which, while it is forcible and impressive, does not offend them. After a hymn and a short prayer, the school is dismissed.

CHAPTER VII.

LEEDS SEWING SCHOOL.

“To make some nook of God’s creation a little fruitfuller, better, more worthy of God ; to make some human hearts a little wiser, manfuller, happier ; more blessed, less accursed ! It is work for a God.”—CARLYLE.

LOOKING back to the first year of the school, the improvement in the manners, appearance, and conduct of the girls, seems to me to be marvellous, especially when I take into account the very few hours during which they come under the civilizing power of their teachers, and the many counteracting influences of their daily lives. At first they used to come dirty in dress and person, just as they had left off work, talk noisily, speak rudely to each other, and it often required considerable firmness to be exerted in maintaining order. Now they almost all dress for school, in a style of neatness and propriety which contrasts strongly with the dirty finery we used to see ; and, when they sit down to their sewing, and throw off the red handkerchiefs

which in the north are the useful and becoming substitutes for bonnets, clean bright heads appear, with glossy braids, which would do credit to the skill of a professed lady's-maid; and, while their manners have all the frank heartiness of Yorkshire, their dialect and voices are comparatively refined and softened.

And that this improvement is not merely external, we have abundant testimony from the overlookers of the neighbouring mills, who uniformly speak of our scholars as being honourably distinguished by their steadiness and good conduct. The mill-owners themselves have given substantial proof of their estimation of the school by their ready contributions towards its necessary expenses.*

* The Rev. Frederick Watkins, one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools, who has watched the progress of our institution from its early days, has several times made favourable mention of it in his reports; and, in a recent letter to the Archbishop of York, on the state of education in Yorkshire, he says, "The girls' sewing school at Leeds is one of the happiest attempts that I have seen to improve the class for whom it is intended."

Robert Baker, Esq. who for twenty-four years was Inspector of Factories in the Leeds district, visited us repeatedly, and requested that an account of the school might be sent him for insertion in his report for 1858. He there writes as follows:—

"What we further want is an extension of that union between the classes of society which is beginning to exert so

Their skill in sewing displays as much improvement. I do not mean to assert that our scholars ever accomplished any very choice

beneficial an influence; not necessarily an association between them, but a direction of the weak by the strong, a softening of the rudeness of ignorant by the touch of educated life; and some inculcation of social economy by those who have risen by its power.

"I am happy in being able to give in Appendix III. the history of an evening school at Leeds for females, which has effected more benefit for the female factory workers, in a quiet way, than many other institutions of higher pretensions.

"This is one of the kind of institutions to which I have just referred. It is opening out those home influences which are hereafter to be more attractive to the working man than the beer-house, or other such places of falsely-called entertainment, and is laying the foundation of a domestic happiness, which will, in time, be reflected upon many hearts as well as within many homes.

"How greatly such evening institutions are needed may be conceived, when it is remembered that not fewer than 409,360 females are at work within the walls of the factories of the United Kingdom.

* * * * *

"Such institutions I earnestly recommend to the ladies of our large manufacturing districts. Many, it is true, exist, but many more are required. They will find how soon the best effects will be produced on these otherwise apparently wild factory workers, by their association with them, and by their kind instructions; that, when only a few months are over, their habits and feelings will be changed, and that the time and labour bestowed upon them will be abundantly repaid."

specimens of needlework : like most mechanical arts, sewing can only be thoroughly acquired in very early life ; but, without having any *haute faits* to boast of, we may state that many thousands of useful garments have been completed by their hands, greatly to the comfort of themselves and their families. I have before me a statement of the articles made in the school in the year 1860. The total number was 1,783, and the amount paid by the scholars for the materials, at cost price, was 95*l.* 12*s.* 5½*d.*

The girls often used to quote their mothers' expressions of thankfulness, that, by the payments being made in such small sums (as little as a penny being taken), they hardly missed the money by which shirts, shifts, petticoats, sheets, and other substantial articles were purchased. In these neighbourhoods the poor are very much accustomed to buy their goods from hawkers, who call periodically for instalments of their money, and who exact a heavy profit to compensate for the risk and delay in payment. In this way a dress, chosen by a girl in some thoughtless moment, often becomes a burden to her for the next two years, during which she pays nearly double what would have been its fair price at a respectable shop.

Our girls were very willing to be taught, and their admiration of their teachers' powers was sometimes quite touching. They would watch our fingers as we made button-holes, or "stroked gathers" (both very mysterious operations to them), with the simple admiration of savages. "Eh, then, but it is pretty to see ye do it;" or, "Eh, but I do wish I could nobbut sew like ye," were frequent comments. Their poor clumsy fingers, with the nails broken and chafed off by their work, and too often cut and scarred by the machinery, or ingrained with indigo dye, were certainly not very well fitted for handling fine needles. At first, few would sew with any needle smaller than a five; and incessant were the requests for a "nee'le wi' a big eye" when the oft-chewed and dirty end of cotton refused to pass in their awkward hands. But, in time, they grew to use these feminine tools far more adroitly, and would even ask for fine needles and thread. I have spoken of their hands as being clumsy; but there is one beauty which they certainly possess to a great extent, and it is a very uncommon one. Their arms are so remarkable for their beautifully rounded form, that I fancy some part of their labour must be peculiarly favourable to this development, and,

as they usually wear high dresses with short sleeves, their arms are very conspicuous.

We soon found that when the garments made at the school were paid for, and taken home, they underwent a very sharp ordeal of criticism from the mothers, both as to materials and shape. From the first, we were excellently supplied with all the materials used; and this, I believe, was one of the main elements of our success. But we were well kept up to the mark by the certainty that any inferiority of quality would be at once detected, and remarked upon. As to cutting out the clothing, we were for some time not very fortunate in giving satisfaction. Our clients and ourselves were quite at issue as to patterns, and I soon found that ignorant as they might be, both of the principles and practice of needlework, yet we were quite as ignorant of what was best suited to their purposes.

One evening I was called into the ante-room by our door-keeper, with the brief and truly Yorkshire announcement, "Lady wants to speak wi' ye"—(folks in canny Yorkshire get rid of such small troubles as articles, whether definite or indefinite). "Lady" turned out to be a stout, jolly red-faced dame, a plaid drawn over her

head, and one of our newly finished harding slips, such as mill-girls wear while at work, in her hands. She threw it down on the table, and said, sarcastically, "Noo, then, ye laadies, *ye* reckon t' teach sewing, whoy, thou know'st no more nor babbies how to cut oot oor things." I gently explained that we might be very good needlewomen, and capable of teaching it, and yet not understand their wishes as to shapes; and asked her to be kind enough to cut me a standard pattern of these slips, as we had had several failures. At first she was not to be propitiated, either by fair words, or even by the sacrifice of the offending garment, which I offered to exchange, and she answered, with the cool irony so often used in the North, "Canna ye cut out a plain slip, and ye such grand teachers?" However, by degrees I smoothed down her wrath, and she explained to me so thoroughly the principle on which these pinafores require to be fitted, that I never again had any difficulty with them. It is, in fact, as I afterwards learnt, a point of no small importance, as the least over-fulness in the sleeves or waist may cause them to catch in the whirling machinery, and entail terrible consequences on their wearers. As we became better

acquainted with their ways, which were certainly as foreign to us as those of the dwellers in Nootka Sound, we gave more satisfaction, and gained their affections by their seeing that we really did take a great deal of trouble to meet each individual want and fancy.

Sometimes I received very perplexing orders, such as, "if y' please, mother says, will ye cut a shirt for oor Tom." Vain were all inquiries as to the dimensions of "oor Tom," and very vague were the answers. "Whoy, not sa vary big, isn't oor Tom." "Happen as big as yon man;" and then, when after infinite toil the shirt was made, "button hoyles" sewed, the well-saved money paid, and it was carried home in triumph, it would be brought back with a dismayed look, and "Whoy, mother says it's ower great for oor Tom, I tell'd ye he wasn'a sa vary big." After a few such disasters, I was obliged to insist upon a pattern shirt being brought for me to measure.

I always found that accuracy of fit, and economy of material, were fully appreciated, at any rate by the mothers.

We sometimes heard, by chance, of observations made by the fathers of our scholars, which were very gratifying. One man, showing more

consideration than is usual in that rank, came to the school "O' purpose to mak' oot" what the institution might be which had so much improved his daughters. He stayed some time, quietly observing the proceedings, and went away, saying, "it was the pleasantest sight he ever had in his life."

On several occasions, the mothers of the pupils have been invited to the schoolroom, and entertained with tea and cake, &c., after which they have been addressed by the teachers and friends of the school on suitable topics.

They were invited to express their own ideas on the subject: one woman said, "Well, if any body had a telled me that the rich would care so much for the poor, I wouln't ha' believed it; but now I see it wi' my own eyes."

Another told the following story in illustration of the great want of such instruction for mill-girls. The dialect of the West Riding is not easy to express in writing—few writers have succeeded in rendering its peculiarities, except Charlotte Brontë; but, by referring to a volume of Chaucer, the resemblance to the English of that day will be found very close, many words being actually identical.

"Ye see, laadies, ther wer a yong man that

wer a joiner, an he got him married to a lass that had allus bin workin' in a mill. Soa, after t' they'd bin wed a bit, says he, 'Lass, thou see'st my shirts is nobbut rags an tatters; but now I've gotten a wife, I 'spect as she'll mak me some grand uns.'

"Well, ye see, lass knaw'd no more nor a cat how to mak a shirt, soa scho puts him off an off while (till) he got a bit mad (angry). At last, one day, scho says, quite cockey-like, 'Noo, lad, I've fun out how they mak shirts: ' an he says, 'All right, lass, then be sharp an mak me some, for thou see'st I'm i' great need!'

"Soa, scho tells him, 'coom lad, thee mun lig (lie) thee down on t' flure, while I measur thee wi' a bit o' band.' An he ligs him down, and scho measurs, an measurs, an then scho gets a bit chalk, and chalks on t' flure all round him. An then scho taks stuff, an scho sews up a big bag for 's body, an two lile (little) bags for 's arms, and then scho says, 'see, lad, ther's thee shirt!' An he taks shirt, an he turns it, an turns it ower and ower, an then he says, 'Whoy, lass! I canna get in, no how!'—an didn't scho want schuling, think ye, laadies?"

CHAPTER VIII.

LEEDS SEWING SCHOOL.

“Shall courtesy be done only to the rich, and only by the rich? In Good-breeding, which differs, if at all, from High-breeding only as it gracefully remembers the rights of others, rather than gracefully insists on its own rights, I discern no special connexion with wealth or birth, but rather that it lies in human nature itself, and is due from all men towards all men.”—CARLYLE.

So far as I have had experience among the poor, I have always found them value trouble and sympathy bestowed upon them, far more than mere money; but to gain their affections in this way (especially when otherwise unknown to them) must of necessity be a work of time. It so happened that (with one exception) every one who took any leading part in our sewing school was entirely unconnected with, and unknown in the district. Had we been mill-owners, and thus the employers of the girls, the consequent *prestige* would have made our task much easier.

As it was, we came from a part of the town *they* seldom visited; our names conveyed no

idea to them ; and our motives in thus coming among them could only be learned by time and experience. After many months' attendance at the school, one of the girls said, on coming up to our house for the first time, " Whoy, I all'us thow't ye was drapers, and sold us t' goods !" She was probably not singular in this opinion, and success, under such circumstances, could not be rapid. But that they did, after a while, fully appreciate the motives of the pains bestowed on them, the following anecdote may show.

One evening, a lady teacher, presiding at one of the tables, found the girls conversing on the splendour and dignity of the then Mayor of Leeds, having seen him that day in his carriage. They asked her, if she had ever seen him ? " Oh, yes," was the reply, " I know him very well, and he asked me to dine with him this evening." Every girl looked up with astonishment, and one said, " Eh, to think of that, now." " Whatever for didn't ye go ?" The teacher's quiet reply was, " Because it was school-night, and I always refuse invitations for Mondays and Thursdays."

The eyes of all at the table were fixed upon her, and the expressions of grateful surprise which burst out were most touching.

One girl said, "Eh, but I do call that kind now, to come down here, when ye might ha' bin sitting at yon grand feast."

Their vast ideas of the grandeur of the mill-owners often amused us; and Mrs. Gaskell shows, in her charming novel, "North and South," a perfect understanding of mill-girls and their ways of thought, when she makes Bessy express her astonishment that Miss Hale, with whom she began to feel quite intimate, whom she knew could not be rich, and whom she was accustomed to see dressed in simple print or muslin, should be going to dine "wi' such grand folks as Thorntons;" and her doubts if Miss Hale had anything in her wardrobe suited to so grand an occasion.

"Noo, then, I *ha'* found ye out," said a girl, once to me, when she met me in the street.

"Found me out, in what, Sarah?" said I, much puzzled to know what discovery excited such energy of expression.

"Whoy, I all'us *did* say, I thow't ye didn't wear yer best dress to t' schule."

The delight the girls used to show on meeting any of the teachers by chance, and the pleasure we found we gave by either visiting a mill where *any of our* scholars worked, or by going into

the district at noon-time, when the streets were crowded with them, returning to their homes, was most affecting.

Latterly, to go through a mill was a sort of triumphal progress; the news of our presence spread from room to room like an electric shock; and, however unwilling we might be to trespass long upon the time of the overlookers, we found it necessary to visit every part, for fear of the affectionate reproaches we were sure of hearing at night if any one had been neglected. It is only just to say that every facility was afforded to our visits, both by masters and men, and that we were deeply gratified by the terms in which we heard "our girls" spoken of.

I remember a particular occasion, when a regiment newly arrived from the Crimea entered the town with great ceremony, and the mills had a half-holiday in its honour. A number of our scholars spied out a party of teachers seated at a window in Briggate; from that moment they seemed entirely occupied with the pleasure of the rencontre; exchanging endless nods and smiles, and pointing us out to their friends, in consequence of which we had several recruits to the school.

I do not mention these anecdotes from mere

egotism, but to show the warm feelings which dwelt under such rude exteriors. Many of these girls, now so heartily affectionate, were actually the same whom, in the first months of my attending the school, I shrank from being left alone with for a quarter of an hour, lest some rudeness should break out which I should be compelled to notice, but unable to repress.

We often heard girls say they "wished every night were school-night;" and one (with an unhappy home, as, alas! so many have) said, with tears in her eyes, "The only bit of peace and comfort I ever get is in this school." This was a girl (and there are many such) whose feelings were too gentle for the hardships of her daily life, and whose home was probably made wretched by the drinking habits of father or brothers. In general they are content with their lot in life. Elizabeth C—— once said to me, "If I could nobbut be sure of allus gettin' eight shillin' a week, I would not care to call t' Queen my cousin."

One teacher writes, "To show that the girls do not praise the school for the sake of any advantage to be gained beyond kind sympathy, and as a proof of their independent, honest *pride*, I can say, as a fact, that during the seven

years in which I have taught in the school not one girl ever begged of me, or even hinted at distress with a view of obtaining money. They will speak of their troubles at home for the sake of sympathy and advice, looking upon their teachers as friends; but this is very different from the begging spirit in which the agricultural poor are apt to relate their privations. In a general way, mill-girls shrink from talking of their poverty; indeed, I cannot remember an instance of their having spoken to me on this subject."

But this delicacy on their part does not render us unmindful of those seasons of scarcity of employment to which Leeds, like other manufacturing towns, is more or less subject. Some of our teachers have cultivated acquaintance with the girls at their homes; and, if their visits among them bring to their knowledge any case of illness or unusual distress, it is relieved. But, as a general rule these visits are only made for the purpose of extending the civilizing influence of our institution, and, in that respect, they have been highly successful.

It is curious to note the shrewd discrimination and comical criticisms of the girls with reference to the character of their teachers.

their freedom in expressing their opinions might startle strangers ; but we never felt it to be impertinence ; on the contrary, we valued it, both as showing us wherein we might have erred in our behaviour towards them, and as an assurance that their expressions of affectionate gratitude were the genuine outpourings of their hearts. As a class, mill-girls have no idea of saying pleasant things from mere politeness, or the wish to gain favour with their teachers ; but they have a quick appreciation of genial qualities. On one occasion a lady from the South of England visited the school for a single night. Sitting at the head of one of the tables, she interested the girls very much by the tales she related to them, possessing, it may be remarked, in no small degree "*l'art de raconter*." For four years afterwards her visit remained green in their memories ; and the very last time I was present at one of their tea-feasts I heard more than one hearty wish that "Yon' beautiful teacher, she ye nobbut ca'ed 'Kate ;' she that telled us such nice tales and niver cam but once," could have been with us.

Now, as a contrast. The school was once visited by a South-country clergyman who *remarked* : " I always thought factory girls were

most miserable creatures, half-killed with work, crippled and sickly ; but these girls look healthy and cheerful, and cannot be tired ; how they do laugh, talk and sing !” On his taking leave, the girls offered their hands, and he said, “ Well, I never shook hands with persons of your class before, but really I shall be quite glad to do so—we are all of the same flesh and blood, you know.” Instead of gratitude for his condescension, it was received with looks of grave surprise, and by some with the flush of wounded feeling ; indeed, in all our relations with them, there was that feeling of equality, that ignoring of the wide gulf usually separating rich and poor, which I have never found among any other working class.

Our girls had a notion that strangers from London or the South would be somewhat “shamefaced” at coming among them, “not being used to mill-girls ;” and such strangers were often surprised to find themselves treated as guests ; the girls taking the part of entertainers, and starting subjects of conversation, as if to place them at their ease. To a gentleman who had for some time assisted in the school, a girl remarked one evening, “ Eh, Mr. ———, ye’ve gotten used to us now, but ye wor shamefaced at fust ; I’ve many a time seen ye blush

like any lass." Another night he was, from head-ache, less cheerful than usual ; and, on his shaking hands with the girls at parting, one said, " Well, Mr. ———, I hope you'll be like yourself next school-night, for ye've bin nobbut dullish and a bit cross too, now hav'n't ye?" But on his pleading illness, the kindest regrets were expressed, with an apology for having pronounced him " a bit cross."

Our scholars seemed to have an intuitive consciousness whether a teacher came among them from a sense of duty rather than from a principle of love ; in which case she usually met with reserve and coldness, the want of love on one side naturally producing it on the other. " Scolding " never answered with them, nor was it probable it should, seeing that the hardest words we were likely to use fell like feathers on ears accustomed to the vehement eloquence of their mothers, on very slight provocation. Indeed, I have often found the children of the poor, while tough as leather against rough corrections, ready to submit at once to kindness as something entirely new to them.

Another feature in our scholars was, that *however* unpolished themselves, they could

fully appreciate true courtesy ; as a proof of this, I may mention that some girls once, speaking very highly of their late employer, old Mr. A——, said, "They liked him because he was a real gentleman, for whenever he entered the room where they were at work, he allus took off his hat and bowed to them."

It was probably their innate feeling of independence and self-respect which prompted the wish to make some return for the kindnesses of their teachers. At first they would bring little offerings of barley-sugar, gingerbread, &c., and slip them into our hands. Afterwards, seeing that we did not care for sweet things ("spice" they called them), they would bring pincushions or crochet collars (for the same girls who cannot handle a needle, can crotchet well). But the most remarkable display of their gratitude has been, that they have several times subscribed money to provide a "Tea" for their teachers, in return for those which have been given to them, previously to which a number of them have sacrificed a day's work and wages for the purpose of cleaning the schoolroom, and decorating it with evergreens and flowers. Their provision of substantial and dainty fare has been abundant ; their hospitality hearty ;

and their conduct throughout marked by a modest dignity most becoming to them. The most interesting of these entertainments was given on the occasion of the marriage of a beloved teacher. No sooner did the rumour of her intended departure from Leeds reach the girls, than they declared "she should have a rare Tea," for which they made unusual preparations, keeping them as far as possible from the knowledge of her family. Amongst their specially invited guests were Dr. Atlay, Vicar of Leeds, and his wife, several of the clergy of the neighbourhood, Mr. Rickards, H.M. Inspector of Factories, and other ladies and gentlemen, friends of the school, the party numbering about two hundred. After tea, an address was presented to the bride-elect, expressive of the affectionate good-wishes and gratitude of the scholars, to which she replied with much feeling. One of the girls then sang very sweetly a parting song, written for the occasion, presenting at the same time an elegant wreath of wild flowers. Speeches from a few of the visitors and teachers then followed, after which the girls had a merry dance to the music of a small band which they had provided, concluding at ten o'clock by singing the National

Anthem. The hostesses and their visitors then separated with much interchange of friendly words and wishes ; and with many expressions of gratification and surprise on the part of such strangers as were present at the spectacle they had witnessed that evening.

CHAPTER IX.

LEEDS SEWING SCHOOL.

"Under the intellectual union of man and man, which works by precept, lies a holier union of affection, working by example; the influences of which latter, mystic, deep-reaching, all-embracing, can still less be computed. For Love is ever the beginning of Knowledge as fire is of light, and works also more in the manner of *fire*."—CARLYLE.

I HAVE, in former chapters, alluded to the assistance which we ladies received in our work from gentlemen; and, as we were sometimes asked with a sneer, what could gentlemen do in a sewing school, I will here express my conviction, that unless we had been able to bring the influence of educated *men* as well as *women* to bear upon our scholars, we should never have attained anything like the same measure of success. There is a spirit of lawless resistance and bold defiance amongst large bodies of girls (of whatever class) which seldom manifests itself against the rule of the superior sex; but from which women are almost always compelled to defend themselves by a more frequent assertion of their weaker authority. This is in itself

an evil in schools of any kind ; to us it would have been particularly mischievous, as our rule could only be founded on the willing obedience of our pupils. In this, as, to my thinking, in all other work, a fair combination of men with women was good both for the rulers and the ruled ; and that those gentlemen who aided in our classes found ample employment, without intruding on the province of the ladies, is as certain as that without their assistance our best endeavours would have failed. By one of them a clear system of accounts was devised for us, and the business-like accuracy with which they were kept was one great means of securing the confidence of the poor. By another a penny savings' bank was established, which proved a most valuable auxiliary to the sewing school, by inducing the girls to deposit those odd half-pence which would otherwise have been wasted on peppermint drops, or other trash. The amount of money spent on "spice and sweet-stuff" by the very poor in these districts would scarcely be credited by those unacquainted with their ways ; the love of women for sweets being almost as prevalent as the love of men for drink, although happily its consequences are much less disastrous.

After the school had been in operation long enough for personal acquaintance with the scholars to be formed, several of the teachers occasionally invited small parties of them to their houses. The ignorance which they manifested as to the social arrangements of gentlemen's families was very amusing. The number and uses of the rooms, furniture, beds, and especially the books, never ceased to excite their surprise—usually tersely expressed by "Eh, but ye have a deal of stuff." "Stuff" being a most comprehensive word in the North. The relation between us and our servants puzzled them much. The discovery that pulling an ivory knob in the drawing-room would ring a distant bell, and cause a servant to appear, was as astonishing to them as Hadji Baba relates it to have been to the Persian princes when staying at Mivart's Hotel, and like him, we were obliged to check the too-frequent repetition of the experiment. A lady was showing them all over her very handsome house, and the large mirrors gave such pleasure that they could hardly be induced to leave them; some laughed, and covered their faces, and said "they wor shamed;" some stood *grave and thoughtful*, while others fairly danced

with delight. The baths in the bed-rooms, and still more the news that they were used daily, excited great wonder ; and, after going all over the house in a bewilderment of admiration, the recognition of familiar objects in the kitchen seemed quite pleasant to them.

When the Queen visited Leeds, the girls told me they expected that she would wear her crown and robes, and carry a sceptre, as they had been accustomed to see her represented in coloured prints. I need hardly say that Her Majesty was dressed like any other lady ; but she thereby disappointed thousands of her loving subjects. The mayor, however, did wear a robe of crimson velvet trimmed with ermine, and, as his carriage headed the procession, numbers mistook him for the Queen. "But," said I, "the mayor has a long white beard, what could you take that for?" "Why, ye see, we nobbut seed the robes and that, and so we tho't it were t' Queen, and that white thing wer her lace veil."

We always dreaded the recurrence of the annual fair as a period of great temptation to our girls. Some of them described the shows they had visited, and one gave the following account of a "wax-work" she saw. "Eh ! but

•

it wor a rare pen'orth ! we saw lots of queens and great ladies ; and ther wor a man in armour they called Oliver Cromwell ; ye see he's been dead a good bit, but when he wor alive Kirk-stall Abbey wor a grand building—not tumbled down as 'tis now—and t'monks and t'nuns all lived in it, and they had a road underground all t'way to t'parish church. So ev'ry night they cam that way t'church to sing psalms, and when Oliver heerd o' their goings on, eh ! he wor mad ! (angry) an he brought a lot o' soldiers from London to blow up t'parish church wi' gunpowder ; but he could do nought, for t'Leed's folks covered t'church from top to bottom wi' wool bags, and so he'd just to go back again. It's a queer story, but it's all true, for t'show man telled us all so." I fancy, that tradition has not handed down to us this adventure of Oliver.

In nothing was the growing intelligence of our scholars more marked than by their progress as listeners to the evening readings. At first, even if they abstained from talking, it was evident they took no sort of interest in the reading, and were heartily glad when it was over, and their tongues again free. All sorts of books were tried : stories about animals,

remarkable shipwrecks, adventures, travels, missionary anecdotes, and all in vain. At last, in despair, a few tales were written for them, in the plainest words, and on familiar topics, and they excited a little interest. From that time we got on by degrees, although always finding great difficulty in the choice of books. None ever suited so well as Mrs. Gaskell's. Her tales of "Hands and Hearts," "Libbie Marsh," "Bessy's Troubles at Home," and some others, were read over and over again, and were always relished. No writer seems to understand the ways of the manufacturing poor so thoroughly. No one so fully sympathizes with their trials, or enters so heartily into their joys and sorrows. One gentleman read a careful selection from "Mary Barton," contriving to retain the interest of that very charming story, while he omitted those parts which were addressed to employers, rather than to workpeople, and which refer chiefly to evils which are not prevalent in our district. I shall never forget the breathless interest which this story excited; the eager faces, the suspended work, and the sigh of regret when the book was closed for the evening. I question whether they accepted it as a fiction at all, the dialogue

and incidents came so home to them. The trial scene brought tears into most eyes ; and I believe half the scholars were in love with "Jem."

A lending library is now established, from which about sixty volumes are in circulation at a time ; but here also we have much difficulty in finding suitable books. The premature knowledge of the world (their world) which such girls acquire while "grinding among the iron facts of life," renders mere children's books uninteresting to them, while their general ignorance prevents their being amused with anything but tales. Many books which might otherwise be suitable enough, are written entirely for the agricultural poor, and always turn upon the doings at "the Hall" and "the Parsonage," places utterly unknown to the dwellers in the close courts of a smoky town. Others are spoiled by over intrusive morals, or a too patronising tone ; and, perhaps, the worst of all are those fashionable stories, which introduce charming children who gallop about on white ponies, and lecture and convert everybody in their village, especially "the oldest inhabitants."

One much beloved teacher established an *evening Bible class*, which met once a week at

her house. It was gladly attended by the elder and more thoughtful girls, and seemed to be effecting good ; but it was brought to a close by her sudden death. Her class attended her funeral, giving up half a day's wages in order to pay this tribute of respect.

CHAPTER X.

FACTORY GIRLS, THEIR MORALS AND THEIR MARRIAGES.

"It is not because of his toils that I lament for the poor; we must all toil, or steal (howsoever we name our stealing), which is worse; no faithful workman finds his task a pastime. The poor is hungry and athirst, but for him also there is food and drink; he is heavy-laden and weary, but for him also the Heavens send Sleep, and of the deepest; in his smoky crib a clear dewy heaven of Rest envelops him, and fitful glitterings of cloud-skirted Dreams. But what I do mourn over is that the lamp of his soul should go out, that no ray of heavenly, or even of earthly, knowledge should visit him."—CARLYLE.

AT one of the Social Science meetings held some time ago at Bradford, one of the speakers, a lady, is reported to have said, with reference to the morals of girls employed in factories, "With them vice is the rule, virtue the exception." This sweeping censure was much canvassed and resented in the district, as being very unjust to the class thus denounced. So far as the experience of our school enables me to judge, I should most indignantly deny *the truth* of such an assertion. I believe

that girls employed in factories are as much above the agricultural peasantry in morals as they are in intelligence, and that in every way factory work is less injurious in its effects upon women than field work. It is true that factory girls are exposed to many peculiar trials and temptations, to which they sometimes yield. And what the difficulties and dangers of *their* homes are, we, sheltered and protected from our childhood, can ill imagine. Yet very few lapses from virtue have occurred among our scholars, and these have been heartily resented by the rest, and so strongly on one occasion, that they insisted on the expulsion of the offender, her conduct being felt to be a disgrace to the whole school—an instance of *esprit de corps* for which we were very thankful.

It was with us a constant subject of admiration, to see girls of from sixteen to twenty, many of them very attractive, steadily pursuing their daily labour; tempted perhaps abroad—tried at home—often ill fed and ill clad—yet contentedly toiling through a long day, and coming to school in the evening with bright cheerful looks, as if they had not a care in the world; forgetting for the hour the home stripped of its furniture, and rendered miserable by the

drunken habits of those who ought to have been its guardians. Virtue which stands the rough trials theirs meets with, is very different from that which has never been exposed to temptation. Let us who have been reared in homes, carefully guarded from evil, humbly confess how much we owe to those slight yet effectual barriers with which etiquette and propriety surround us, and which can only be overleaped by really vicious minds, yet to many of a weak and passive disposition these are almost the only security against evil.

We have often been grieved by the slight and thoughtless way in which our girls treated love and marriage, engaging themselves with little consideration or inquiry as to the characters of their lovers, and even when themselves suffering by the extravagance of a drunken father, seeming to accept such troubles as matters of course, and taking little precaution to escape them in their own married life. But want of serious thought on these subjects is by no means peculiar to factory girls; it is very common amongst the lower classes, and is the source of innumerable evils to them. It appears to me to arise as much from a deficiency of *imagination* and romance as from want of pru-

dence. Almost every thoughtful mistress must at some time have been shocked at the careless way in which even respectable servants accept, reject, or exchange their lovers, and she sees with regret the change which a few months of ill-judged matrimony will make in the appearance of some petted domestic.¹ How is this to be remedied? I doubt whether the progress of education does half so much to improve the principles and judgment of this class as the rapid increase of finery (imitated, be it remembered, from their betters) does to encourage the desire for the freedom which they are foolish enough to expect to attain by marriage. Surely, as mistresses, we ought to do all that lies in our power to ascertain that their lovers are

¹ In a case which came within my own knowledge, a highly respectable woman, who was to be married on the following day to a carpenter, with whom she had "kept company" for some time, excused her marriage in this way—"Why, ma'am, really then I don't see how I can help it; he ha' been a courtin' like after me sich a time. 'Taint that I like him so much hisself *now*, but when ye come to sit opposite a man at 'wittles' three times a day, I kinder think ye must come to love him at last." And another, a trusty and valued servant, coming up to say good-bye to her mistress on her wedding morning, replied in answer to wishes for her happiness, "Well, ma'am, there's only one thing much agin it that I know on; ye see I don't so vastly like the *man hisself*."

respectable, and that both parties are in earnest; and then, by allowing a reasonable degree of intercourse, to protect them from the perils of clandestine meetings. But too often the love-making which would be not only authorised, but encouraged in the drawing-room, is ignored and forbidden in the kitchen, as if servants were not beings "of like passions with ourselves."

As to *economical foresight* in such marriages, I think we sometimes expect rather more of this than is reasonable. from a class whose wants are so simple. If in the rank which depends on daily labour for daily bread a young couple have health, strength, a prospect of employment, and a sincere attachment to each other, there is little more to be desired: let them marry with that freedom from anxiety for the future which is one of the blessings of the poor.

"They're no sae wretched's ane wad think,
Tho' constantly on poortith's brink;
They're sae accustom'd wi' the sight,
The view o't gives them little fright.

"Then chance an' fortune are sae guided;
They're ay in less or mair provided;
An' tho' fatigued wi' close employment,
A blink o' rest's a sweet enjoyment."

If they are in circumstances to lay by some-

thing against "a rainy day," so much the better ; but we whose savings are made by cutting off our *luxuries*, not by stinting ourselves or our children in *necessaries*, do not sufficiently bear in mind that to the poor, in that sense, almost all days are "rainy," or at least "showery," and that to spend their earnings in the best food they will purchase is often as prudent an investment as can be made by those whose well-being depends so entirely on their bodily strength.

CHAPTER XI.

DWELLINGS OF THE POOR.

“What Worahip, for example, is there not in mere Washing ?

Perhaps one of the most moral things a man, in common cases, has it in his power to do. Strip thyself, go into the bath, or were it into the limpid pool and running brook, and there wash and be clean ; thou wilt step out again a purer and a better man.

* * * *

To that dingy fuliginous operative, emerging from his soot-mill, what is the first duty I will prescribe, and offer help towards ? That he clean the skin of him.

* * * *

‘Cleanliness is near of kin to Godliness ;’ yet never, in any country, saw I operative men worse washed, and, in a climate drenched with the softest cloud-water, such a scarcity of baths !”—CARLYLE.

IN no way can the rich afford more effectual or permanent aid to the poor than by removing some of the many physical inconveniences from which they suffer. Better cottages, better sewerage, better air, and a more plentiful supply of water, are inestimable boons to those who cannot command, and probably do not even appreciate them, for this is not a mere question of

supply and demand. Like religious instruction, the supply must come first, or it will not come at all. Over-crowded dwellings are a fearful source of demoralization and disease, yet how can the poor escape the evils they entail by any efforts of their own, or of those small cottage landlords who are not much better off than themselves? They must live within a reasonable distance of their work; and our population increases much faster than the accommodation provided for them; this is not less an evil because it is one which they do not always feel for themselves. *We* can scarcely estimate the degree in which *they* are injured morally, by the want of those feelings of delicacy, which if they possessed, must in their circumstances render their lives miserable. What can the few hours spent by girls at school during five days of the week do to counteract the influences of all which they see and hear during the remainder of their time? Physically, the amount of disease engendered or increased by the deficiency of pure air in crowded sleeping-rooms is indeed lamentable; and that the poor are generally very little aware of the cause of their sufferings renders the case more hopeless. The want of a plentiful supply of bedclothes makes them

shrink from the admission of air, and shut themselves up close in order to hoard the little warmth they can obtain. In the country, where the day is spent in out-door labour, the evils of the night are in some measure counteracted ; but in towns, where the air of the factory or workshop is scarcely less vitiated than that of the bedroom, the effects are far worse, and the oppression thus induced causes a craving for drink or exciting food to stimulate the languid frame. The use of cold water is very unpopular with the poor, and in their crowded bedrooms much ablution is hardly practicable ; thus one cheap source of health is cut off from those whose occupations render it especially needful. They are not at all aware of the important functions of the skin, or they might thus do much to protect themselves from the noxious effects of certain trades, such as miners, painters, &c. As the higher classes have made much progress in personal cleanliness during the last few years, let us hope that, like other fashions, it may in time descend.

But the scarcity of water itself is the source of much mischief. How little can a lady who never felt the weight of a pail of water in her *life*, appreciate the difficulties of those who.

whether infirm from age, or suffering from illness, have to fetch every drop of this prime necessity of life from a distance. If thus hard to obtain, a less quantity is made to serve; the already scanty supply of clean linen is diminished, and the floors are washed with the polluted water in which the clothes have been boiled, and thus the exhalations from the floors become noxious, not only by their dampness, but from their tendency to engender fevers, as I recollect to have been the case in a Yorkshire village, one hot, dry summer. No greater comfort has of late years been conferred on the working classes than the establishment of "Public Baths and Wash-houses." Here the industrious mother of a large family can find at a small charge an abundant supply of hot water, and convenient means of rapidly drying and ironing linen; the whole being finished in an hour or two. But if a weary husband returns from his day's toil to a small room crossed in every direction by lines of wet clothes flapping in his face, and a wife exhausted and worried by the slow process of washing at home, the prospect of a warm, brightly lighted room, and pleasant society at the public-house, may well prove a temptation hard to resist. Let those

1

who pass their lives in spacious rooms, amid unnumbered and often unnoticed comforts, who never knew what it is to want either warmth, light, or food, and who yet feel the petty annoyances of domestic life to be wearing to the spirits and temper, remember what the homes of the poor are, and do what they can to render them less morally and physically unhealthy.

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

“One grand invaluable secret there is, however, which includes all the rest, and, what is comfortable, lies clearly in every man’s power—*To have an open loving heart, and what follows from the possession of such!* Truly it has been said, emphatically in these days ought it to be repeated, ‘A loving Heart is the beginning of all Knowledge.’”—CARLYLE.

I HAVE but a few remarks to make in conclusion. If there be any truth in those dying words of Judge Talfourd—“The great want of English society is sympathy”—there can be little difficulty in deciding on which class of that society the fault is chargeable. No careful observer of the numberless efforts that are now being made to ameliorate our social system can fail to see to what a sad extent those efforts are neutralized by a wrong spirit, or an injudicious manner. A kind, well-intentioned lady once said to me, “I do *so* like poor people when they know their proper place.” Some people make the same reservation as to animals, but I should

not like to leave a favourite cat or dog to the tender mercies of these lovers of propriety. How can the poor feel grateful for charity bestowed in such a spirit! they feel rather that they are only being "fed with the crumbs which fall from the rich man's table," and they anticipate a reversal of lots hereafter; indeed, I believe there is a very general faith amongst those who have little other, that *because* they have been poor in this world they will be amply recompensed in another.

Again, many well-meaning and zealous people are in the habit of adopting towards the poor a manner totally different from that which they use towards their equals in social rank. They look upon them as so much raw material for them to patronize and improve, and as they take little pains to conceal this feeling they are met with sullen reserve by the independent, and with slavish cunning by the greedy; they too often begin by reproving before they have gained sufficient influence for their censure to be regarded, except as it may modify the expected dole. Ought they, then, to be surprised if every artifice is practised to deceive them? And if ladies intrude Scripture *into every sentence* of their discourse, the pro-

bable result is, that the moment they are seen approaching, the Bible is caught up by those who open it at no other time, and who thus acquire an irreverent familiarity with the letter of the Gospel, while their hearts are untouched by its spirit. But while offering this caution, I am far from undervaluing the effect of those words, which are indeed as balm in the hands of those who know how to apply them "in season." When the heart is softened by gratitude or affliction, the truths of the Gospel may be implanted like seed sown after

"The useful trouble of the rain,"

and in due time spring up and bear good fruit.

A great living writer has said, "No character, we may affirm, was ever rightly understood till it had first been regarded with a certain feeling, not of tolerance only, but of sympathy; for here, more than in any other case, it is verified that the heart sees farther than the head." A loving heart is indeed "the beginning of all knowledge," and, possessing this, we may wield the great power of sympathy, and effect much by simple means. What changes were wrought on unpromising subjects by the influence of the Sewing School at Leeds I have related; and in

the same neighbourhood a lady, whose genial disposition enables her to open hearts with this key of "sympathy," contrived to restrain and civilize a large class of collier lads, formerly the proverbial despair of schoolmasters and clergymen. The unpretending records in "Hands and Hearts" and "The Ways of the Line," of what was achieved amongst a still rougher class by Miss Marsh and Miss Tregelles, are further proofs of the power of an earnest and loving spirit. With pages like theirs before us we do not need

"Lives of great men to remind us
We may make our lives sublime;"

without possessing great gifts of any kind beyond that simple charity of the Gospel, which hopeth and endureth all things, we may

"Leave footprints on the sands of time—
Footprints that perhaps another
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
Some forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, may take heart again."

In all our intercourse with the poor, let us behave towards them with frankness and gentleness, making large allowance for their errors and shortcomings, pitying their many trials, *admiring* their much patience, and endeavouring

to remove as many as we can of the obstacles which so thickly bestrew their path in life. Thus shall we best carry out that precept which includes so much, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ;" and while we are deeply grateful for any fruit of our labours which we may be permitted to see, let us humbly remember that "it is not our works which are all mortal, infinitely little, and the greatest no greater than the least, but only the spirit we have worked in, that can have worth and continuance."

THE END.

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